

# THE RICHMOND TIMES

## EASTER NUMBER



"He is Risen"

**E**ASTER is the great annual feast of the Christian year; the one day on which all Christians join in celebrating and commemorating the culmination of their faith and the fulfillment of their hopes. The feast is one of great antiquity in the church. Its beginning was obscured by widely diverse practices on the part of different churches—some celebrating the fourteenth day of the moon of the month Nisan, irrespective of the day of the week, while others, with equal vehemence, asserted and celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord on the first Sunday occurring after the fourteenth day of the moon of the month Nisan. Finally the question was definitely settled by the council of Nicaea in the year 325, from which time Sunday was by common consent made the day on which Easter fell.

The origin of the feast has been attributed to various Saxon, Greek and Roman festivals, and it is true that the name Easter is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word "Eostre," the goddess of the Spring, and even Persian religious observances have been called upon to explain this, the chief feast of the Christians. The cause and power of Easter lie far deeper—and their true significance is not to be grasped by merely pointing out that in other religions whose worshippers stood awe-struck before the mighty forces of nature, there had been periods of rejoicing at the spring solstice. Truly the worshippers of the sun, and moon, and sea, and mountain might well be glad when the reviving earth showed by the tender leaves and flowers that the year had rolled again past the cold and dreariness of winter into the warmth of spring, the forerunner of the abundant life of summer's fruits and

harvests. The promise of returning food and warmth were powerful enough to stimulate the imagination and catch the attention of far lower minds than those which first began the celebration of Easter.

As St. Chrysostom said of the early Christians: "The whole of time is a festival with Christians because of the excellency of the good things which have been given." And so at first the young church prepared itself by a life of purity and blamelessness for the second coming, which is daily and almost hourly expected. Hours and days gave place to hurrying years and still the world went on. Many were gathered to their last resting place without ever having sight of that glorious vision whose light had lightened their souls throughout this life's journey. Those who yet remained on their pilgrimage were irresistibly and naturally turned to their belief in the rising again of their Lord; and to the promise it held out to them and their loved ones. With each succeeding year the gap between the Man of Nazareth and his followers lengthened—until only the traditions of his life and teachings were left to his living disciples. The great basis of his religion was the power which each man has to live eternally; and the great demonstration of this principle was his own resurrection. The Christians of the early centuries felt this as strongly as it is felt to-day. They saw that without the resurrection both the belief and their faith were vain—and as peoples, no less than individuals, are wont to do, some day was set apart for the perpetual remembrance of a great event, whose force and significance were thus kept clearly in their minds. From this intuitive tendency sprang up here and there the usage of keeping Easter, until the whole church was celebrating in unison the power and glory of the Resurrection.

The physical delights which characterized and too often scandalized the celebration of Easter in the Middle Ages when priests used to give pantomimes and plays from the pulpits and the people gave themselves up to feasting and pleasure, have given place to the religious and spiritual celebration of to-day. Each country has its own customs. The most universal custom on Easter Day is that of giving eggs, often beautifully colored, as a symbol of the life beyond the grave. This custom is in use even in Persia, where there is a feast in the spring celebrating the return of the sun, at which eggs have been given and received from time immemorial. In Russia the whole people rejoice together, and each greets the other with the salutation "He is Risen," to which the reply is made, "He is Risen Indeed." Easter is also made the occasion in Russia for the general distribution of alms among the ever present and seemingly hopeless poor of that country.

In France, Italy, and Spain, where Easter is known as Paques and Pasqua, a word derived from the Hebrew Paschal, "the Feast of the Passover," the celebrations are most ornate and marvelous. In addition to the services in the churches, when every adjunct of music and ritual is used to add to this impressiveness, there are wonderful processions of miracle-working saints and images—and extraordinary representations of the sufferings and triumph of Christ during the week preceding Easter.

In Protestant countries the fasts of Lent and the rejoicings at Easter are both less pronounced, but the true inwardness of the occasion is none the less sought after and felt. There are no great church parades, no publicly organized demonstrations, no general giving of salutations between rich and poor and high and low, but the spirit of the day in all its power is upon the people of America, even as upon their fellow Christians of other lands—the spirit that feels, though it may not express, the hope and promise of "He is risen."